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AUTHOR	Sadker, Myra
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ABSTRACT

This presentation discusses some of the policies which may discourage or inhibit female students in higher education: Insufficient day care facilities; insufficient quantity and quality of evening educational offerings; inflexible transfer requirements; and inadequate counseling for mature women who return to school. Also discussed are attitudes of peers and teachers which may discourage female students by lowering self esteem and inhibiting the motive to achieve. It is emphasized that years of interaction in which women pretend intellectual inferiority take their toll. A study is described which underscores how total and complete is the put down of the female ego. By the time she reaches college, the woman's image of the ideal female role is one devoid of high academic and professional success. It is suggested that colleges and universities must not continue to rob female students of a positive self image, but must instead provide a structure and an environment where women can maximize the potential inherent within them. (Author/BW)

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NEEDED - A MORE SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR COLLEGE WOMEN

Dr. Myra Sadker

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-PARKSIDE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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"A woman needs what will make her a queen of the household and of society, while man needs what will fit him for the harder, sterner duties of life, to which ladies should never be driven except in cases of exigency.

"She cannot afford to risk her health in acquiring a knowledge of the advanced sciences, mathematics, or philosophy for which she has no use. . . . Too many women have already made themselves permanent invalied by an overstrain of study at schools and colleges."

--editors of a student newspaper,
Agricultural College of Pennsylvania, 1889

Although a statement such as the one above could never be made today, there is still much, both formal and informal, in higher education that discriminates against female students and discourages them from continuing their education. Through its policies and structure, higher education is tailored to meet the needs of male students but does not demonstrate equal concern for women. This is particularly true for married women, for women with children, and mature women who wish to continue their education. Following is a discussion of some of these unequal policies.

If the female student tries to combine raising a family and continuing her education, the result will likely be intense frustration. Too often no day care services are provided, or if facilities are available, they will only admit children who have reached a certain age, typically three. If a woman with children is determined to continue her education, she must resort to a variety of unsatisfactory, makeshift arrangements. If there is extra money (and usually this is not the case) she can hire a babysitter; if she has friends in the same predicament, she can band with them in an informal day care arrangement. If these options are not available, she can bring her baby to class with her, get a seat near the door

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and steel herself for frequent interruptions and possible instructor hostility. If this proves too trying, she can drop out.

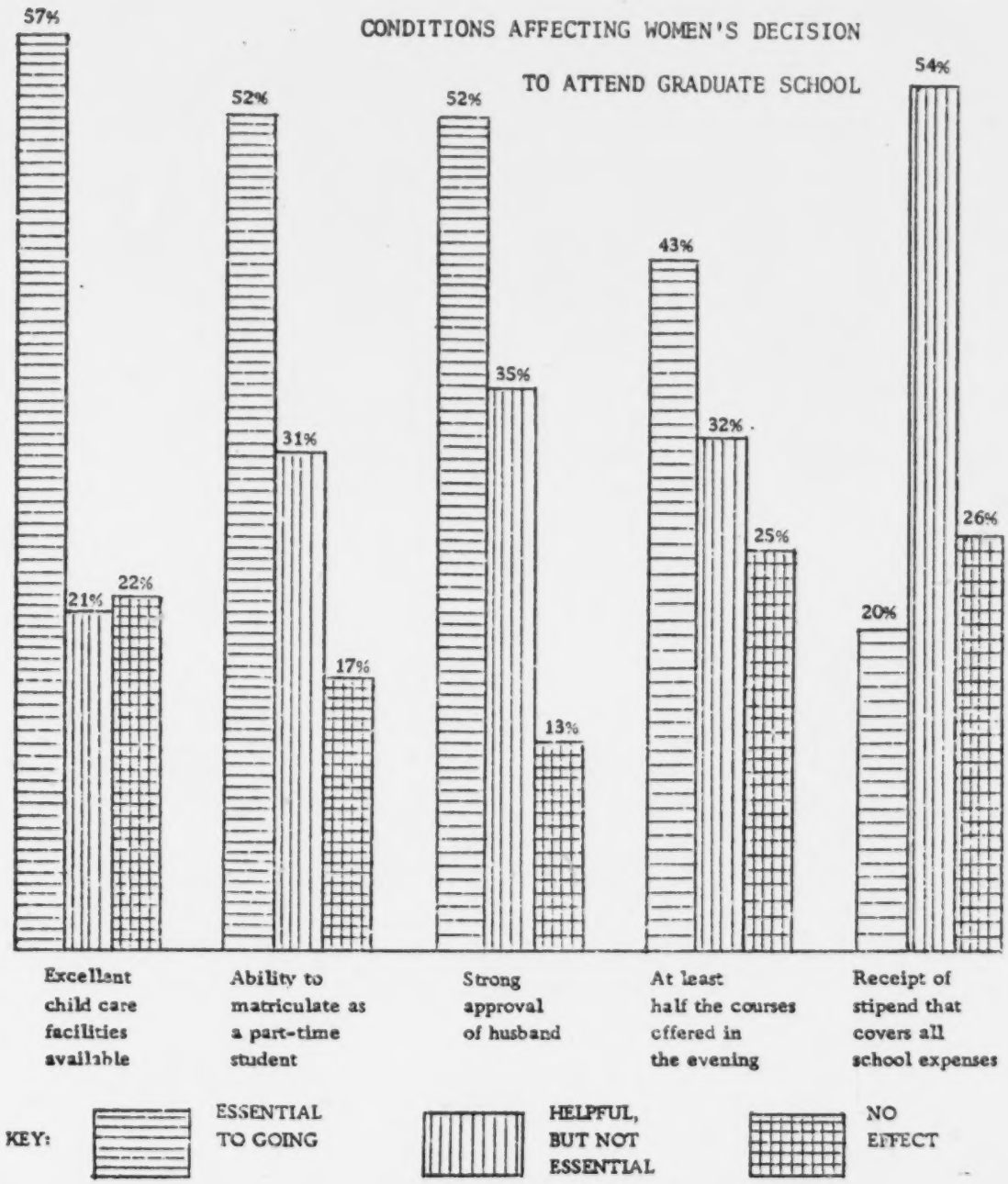
A well equipped and competently staffed day care facility is only one option which universities could but typically do not provide. Due to a rigid time schedule class attendance is also made difficult for a woman with a family. Courses, for the most part are offered during the day, at the very time when the married woman is busiest with household responsibilities. Most universities do offer some evening courses, but these are often minimal and frequently end early. If she needs particular required courses to graduate, she may have to wait several semesters until the courses are offered at night, thereby dragging out her college attendance for several years.

Another difficulty concerns inflexible transfer requirements. A married woman, if she tries to be responsive to mobility demands of her husband's career, may find herself starting college or graduate school in one university and completing it in another. In this process of transfer, she may lose numerous hard-earned credits, particularly at the graduate level. Even if she does not have to cope with shifting locations, she may have to meet a university requirement of taking nine or 12 credits each semester in order to graduate. This demand, combined with home and child care responsibilities, may create a pressured learning situation, one that may finally cause her to leave school.

There is another group of women for whom the university does not show sufficient concern. These are the women who leave school to raise their children, and then ten or 20 years later, try to resume their university careers. This is a pattern which a growing number of women are following: between 1950 and 1969, school enrollment rose from 26,000 to 311,000 among women 25 to 29, and from 21,000 to 215,000 among women 30 to 34 years of

age.[1] These perservering women need special services which universities typically do not supply. After several years spent in homes with growing children, they may feel ill at ease on a campus surrounded by younger students. They may suffer worry and concern that years away from the classroom have left them incapable of doing rigorous academic work. These women will need special advising, counseling, and placement services.

Following is a graph which indicates what is important to women when they select a graduate school. It is up to colleges and universities to respond.



Source: Special Report on Women and Graduate Study,
U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, June 1968

Considering college policies insensitive to the life styles of women, it is no wonder that only 39% of those who begin college ever acquire their B.A.'s, and of all Ph.D.'s earned in 1968, only 13% were received by women.[2]

Perhaps even more discouraging than policies and structure are attitudes the college woman may encounter on campus. Following are comments which professors have made to or about their female students - which are indications of disparaging attitudes and expectations.

I know you're competent and your thesis advisor knows you're competent. The question in our minds is are you really serious about what you're doing.

The admissions committee didn't do their job. There is not one good-looking girl in the entering class.

Have you ever thought about journalism? (to a student planning to get a Ph.D. in political science). I know a lot of women journalists who do very well.

No pretty girls ever come to talk to me.

A pretty girl like you will certainly get married; why don't you stop with an M.A.?

You're so cute. I can't see you as a professor of anything.

The girls at (X university) get good grades because they study hard, but they don't have any originality.

(Professor to a student looking for a job) You've no business looking for work with a child that age.

We expect women who come here to be competent, good students, but we don't expect them to be brilliant or original.

Women are intrinsically inferior.

Any woman who has got this far has got to be a kook. There are already too many women in this department.

How old are you anyway? Do you think a girl like you could handle a job like this? You don't look like the academic type.[3]

Attitudes women students learn when interacting with peers may be even more detrimental than those they pick up in conversation with their teachers. Through such interactions they learn that the image of scholarship and academic excellence is an unflattering one, and that outshining male classmates is not the route to popularity. Many women actually try to hide academic talent and excellence.

In interviews conducted in 1947 at Barnard, college women expressed the confusion they were experiencing in trying to fulfill two conflicting roles--that of aggressive, intellectual student in the classroom and that of passive not-too-bright date on the weekends.

> "My mother thinks that it is very nice to be smart in college but only if it doesn't take too much effort. She always tells me not to be too intellectual on dates, to be clever in a light sort of way."
>
> "I was glad to transfer to a women's college. The two years at the co-ed university produced a constant strain. I am a good student; my family expects me to get good marks. At the same time, I am normal enough to want to be invited to the Saturday night dance. Well, everyone knows that on campus the reputation of a brain killed a girl socially. I was always fearful lest I say too much in class or answer a question which the boys I dated couldn't answer."

Their comments also reveal the variety of techniques they had developed to disguise outstanding ability.

"When a girl asks me what mark I got last semester, I answer, 'Not so good--only one A.' When a boy asks the same question I say very brightly with a note of surprise, "Imagine, I got an A!'"

"One of the nicest techniques is to spell long words incorrectly once in a while. My boyfriend seems to get a great kick out of it and writes back, 'Honey, you certainly don't know how to spell.'"

"It embarrassed me that my high school steady got worse marks than I. A boy should naturally do better in school. I would never tell him my marks and would often ask him to help me with my homework."[4]

As high a figure as 40% of the Barnard women admitted that they faked being dumb. In 1949, the study was replicated at Stanford University; there 46% of the women interviewed acknowledged that they pretended intellectual inferiority when talking with men.[5] In 1969, a third replication of the study, again at Stanford, 40% of the women admitted to playing dumb when in male company.[6] The pattern, unfortunately, is consistent: an extremely high number of high school and college women are pretending to be less than they are.

Years of social interaction in which women pretend intellectual inferiority take their toll. A study, which was recently reported in Psychology Today, underscores how total and complete is the put down of the female ego. By the time she reaches college, her image of the ideal female role is one devoid of high academic and professional success.

Ninety women and eighty-eight men at the University of Michigan were asked to make up a story about the following sentences. "After first-term finals, John (Anne) finds himself (herself) at the top of his (her) medical

school class." The women wrote about Anne, the men about John. Here are some representative stories:

Boys' Stories

"John has worked very hard and his long hours of study paid off. . . . He is thinking about his girl, Cheri, whom he will marry at the end of medical school. He realizes he can give her all the things she desires after he becomes established. He will go on in medical school and be successful in the long run.

"John is a conscientious young man who worked hard. He is pleased with himself. John has always wanted to go into medicine and is very dedicated. . . . John continues working hard and eventually graduates at the top of his class.

Girls' Stories

"Ann is an acne-faced bookworm. She runs to the bulletin board and finds she's at the top. A chorus of groans is the rest of the class's reply. . . . She studies 12 hours a day, and lives at home to save money. "Well it certainly paid off. All the Friday and Saturday nights without dates, fun. . . . I'll be the best woman doctor alive. And yet a twinge of sadness comes thru--she wonders what she really has. . . .

"Anne has a boyfriend, Carl, in the same class and they are quite serious. . . . She wants him to be scholastically higher than she is. Anne will deliberately lower her academic standing the next term, while she does all she subtly can to help Carl. His grades come up and Anne soon drops out of medical school. They marry and he goes on in school while she raises their family.

Anne is talking to her counselor. Counselor says she will make a fine nurse.[7]

The stories were scored to assess whether there were any negative feelings associated with being successful. In their stories fewer than 10% of the men showed any motive to avoid success. In contrast, over 65% of the college women showed negative reactions toward the successful female medical student.

In a book called Children's Letters to God the following letter, written by an elementary school girl, appears,

Dear God,

Are boys really better than girls. I know you are one, but please try to be fair.

Love,

Sylvia

It expresses a sense of great loss at a very early age. Colleges and universities must not continue to rob female students of a positive self image, but must instead provide a structure and an environment where women can maximize the potential inherent within them.

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